

What's in a heart – culture-specific concepts of emotionality and rationality

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Emotions have been widely discussed in research and in literature, one example being the ongoing discussion whether emotion metaphors are universal or culture-specific (cf. for example Kövecses 2000, Holland & Quinn 1987). My talk wants to carry this debate one step further as it will argue that not only the emotions as such are not completely comparable but also the underlying cultural models referring to emotions and rationality. Although our bodies function in similar ways all over the world, there are markedly different ways of explaining body and mental functions.

Our subconscious emotion concepts come to the fore in our everyday language usage, for instance when we claim that our heart was “broken” by somebody. Of course a heart cannot literally break, but how come we connect a simple blood pump with the prototypical emotion of romantic love? The history of this concept is quite ancient and it is definitely not universal. Recent work in Applied Cognitive Linguistics argues that there are different cultural models world-wide of where emotions are located in the human body and where rationality is located. After discussing these different cultural models from a philosophical and anthropological perspective, I will focus on the concepts underlying present-day English. These concepts are especially traceable in the use of metaphor and metonymy which are apparently quite reluctant to change because up till today they still follow Cartesian principles, i.e. emotions are conceptualized as located in the heart and rationality is conceptualized as located in the head, although modern medical science tells us quite a different story.

The aim of my paper then is threefold, namely to explore

- a) the ways in which internal body organs are employed in different languages to conceptualize human experiences such as emotions and/or workings of the mind
- b) the cultural models that account for the observed similarities and differences of the various conceptualizations
- c) the *heart/head* dichotomy in modern English

Thus, the paper aims at bringing together research from Applied Cognitive Linguistics, i.e. the search for the impact of metaphorical thought, and Cultural Studies, i.e. the search for the cultural models that may have channelled these conceptualisations

References

Holland, Dorothy & Naomi Quinn, 1987, *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*. Cambridge: CUP.

Kövecses, Zoltán, 2000, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: CUP.

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